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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7343  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5877  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3068  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1479  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
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SUBJECT: DELHI DIARY, JANUARY 20-23, 2009

¶1. (U) Below is a compilation of political highlights from Embassy New Delhi for January 20-23, 2009, that did not feature in our other reporting, including:

- Dalai Lama Asks Delhi to Choose Dialogue, Promote Tolerance
- Former BJP Parliamentarians Join Congress in Karnataka
- CPM Suspends Unlikely Communist Muslim Modi Fan
- "BJP Candidate" Wins India Islamic Cultural Center Presidency
- Kashmiri Pandit's Mark "Holocaust Day"

Dalai Lama Asks Delhi to Choose Dialogue, Promote Tolerance  
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¶2. (SBU) The Dalai Lama delivered several talks focused on nonviolence and religious tolerance January 16-18 in New Delhi. In his Madhavrao Scindia Memorial lecture on "Nonviolence as a Strategic Tool," his audience included Delhi's political elite, including Congress Party heir-apparent Rahul Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Vadra, Home Minister Chidambaram, his predecessor, Shivraj Patil, Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit, and Election Commissioner Navin Chawla. As tensions simmer between India and Pakistan, the Dalai Lama wove a subtle theme of the importance of nonviolence without directly mentioning the regional conflict. He noted that "dialogue is needed most" when two parties have reached the "absolute brink."

¶3. (U) The Dalai Lama underlined the historical tradition of religious tolerance and respect in India. He argued that India, the birthplace and/or home to many of the world's great religions, has exported religious tolerance to the world. Without referring to last year's violence in Orissa and Karnataka, the Dalai Lama suggested that recently India has failed to foster religious tolerance within its borders and questioned the causes of this failure. He suggested India should maximize its cultural heritage of ahimsa (nonviolence) and compassion at home and abroad. In a speech at the India Islamic Cultural Centre, the Dalai Lama also advocated India's concept of secularism, which does not preclude religion or define secularism in purely non-religious terms.

¶4. (U) Responding to a question on the use of nonviolence and compassion in combating terrorism, the Dalai Lama admitted these tools can only be effective to a point as once an individual reaches such an extreme (i.e. becomes a terrorist), he is "already gone." He advised India to up focus on education as the best means for preventing extremism, adding that "textbooks should teach non-violence and peace, morals without touching religion, and the concept of compromise."

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The Dalai Lama cleverly and deftly delivered several tough messages to Indian politicians, academics, and others, using his trademark tools of self-deprecation and humor. Given his spiritual standing and excellent relationship with the GOI, these messages are much better received. End Comment.

Former BJP Parliamentarians Join Congress in Karnataka  
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¶6. (SBU) Three former BJP members of parliament (MPs) from Karnataka joined the Congress Party on January 20. All three defied the BJP party whip in July 2008 and voted in support of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement. The BJP then kicked them out of the party and, under Indian parliamentary procedure, they lost their seats in parliament. The highest profile of the three, H.T. Sangliana, is a former police chief of Bangalore and a Christian. He became disillusioned with the BJP in Karnataka when it failed to appoint any religious minorities to prominent posts when the party won

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the May 2008 state legislative assembly elections.

¶7. (SBU) While the addition of the three former MPs helps the Congress Party in some ways, it may also cause additional complications for the already-divided state party apparatus, a top Karnataka Congress Party official told Consulate General Chennai. He said that the state party was already having difficulty in distributing constituencies to potential candidates for the upcoming national elections, and the addition of three former MPs wanting seats as Congress Party candidates threatened to complicate the party's internal dynamics even more. For example, Sangliana apparently wants to be the Congress Party's candidate for Bangalore's central constituency, which contains large numbers of both Christian and Muslim voters. Former Union Railways Minister C.K. Jaffer Sharief (a Muslim) has also expressed his desire to run for the Congress Party in the same district.

¶8. (SBU) Many observers cite the Congress Party's inability to settle on a clear Chief Minister candidate for the May 2008 legislative assembly elections as a key factor in the party's loss. If the disarray continues in the run-up to the national polls, it can only help the Congress Party's main opponents in the state, the BJP and the regional Janata Dal-Secular (JDS).

CPM Suspends Unlikely Communist Muslim Modi Fan  
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¶9. (U) The Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) suspended Member of Parliament A.P. Abdullakkutty from the party for one year for publicly praising Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi. Abdullakkutty had praised Modi's investment-friendly policies at a meeting of overseas Keralaites held in Dubai. Explaining the disciplinary action, CPM leaders told the media that the industrial policies of Gujarat were "extreme right-wing and neo-liberal." Describing Modi as a "communist and a fascist," the CPM leaders said no communist could justify Modi's actions. The party also said Abdullakkutty's decision to speak directly to the press rather than through the party chain of command justified the punishment.

¶10. (U) Abdullakkutty, a Muslim elected from the CPM's

stronghold in north Kerala, has a history of bucking the party line. He previously angered party leadership by criticizing Leftist parties' tendency to call general strikes for trivial reasons. In addition, Abdullakkutty's open religious devotion is a bone of contention in the CPM, which requires all office-holders to be "secular." Abdullakkutty was unrepentant in the face of his suspension, saying that he admired Modi's industrial policies, not his communal vision. Media contacts believe that the CPM might eventually expel Abdullakkutty for his refusal to apologize. The CPM action once again demonstrates the iron hand by which the party enforces discipline, even on those who might merely be repeating what is a growing consensus - that Modi has fostered a business friendly climate in Gujarat.

"BJP Candidate" Wins India Islamic Cultural Center  
Presidency  
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¶11. (U) Sirajuddin Qureshi, sitting president of Delhi's India Islamic Cultural Center (IICC), easily won reelection on January 19 despite accusations that he was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate. Founded in 1984 with help from Indira Gandhi, the IICC serves as a hub for Muslim elite in Delhi and provides a forum for Islamic and inter-religious programs. A wealthy businessman, Qureshi in the past created an organization to "build bridges" between Muslims and the BJP, the right of center political party considered anathema by most Indian Muslims. Qureshi enjoyed the open support of Muslim BJP politician Shahnawaz Hussain, while his opponent,

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Salman Khurshid, received open support from senior Congressman and Sonia Gandhi advisor Ahmed Patel. Khurshid accused Qureshi of "communalizing" the IICC and of having the BJP's "backing." Khurshid's charges failed to stick and Qureshi, as well as his slate of board members, won handily.

¶12. (U) Leadership elections at IICC are generally not fought on a party basis. Even this race, though politically tinged, did not amount to a full BJP vs. Congress race. Khurshid's failed attempt to tarnish Qureshi with the BJP label should not be read for broader national implications, despite the fact that the BJP may want to play it that way. The Center's voters comprise roughly 2,000 members of Delhi's Muslim elite, hardly representative of India's 160 million Muslims.

Kashmiri Pandit's Mark "Holocaust Day"  
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¶13. (U) Kashmiri Pandit's demonstrated in Delhi on January 19 - "Holocaust Day" as they call it - to mark the nineteenth anniversary of their exile. Successive Indian governments have tended to overlook this Hindu community despite the fact that jihadi-enforced ethnic cleansing has driven virtually every Kashmiri Pandit -- over 600,000 of them -- from their homes in the Valley. Community organizations Panun Kashmir and Kashmiri Samiti criticized the GOI for failing to broker a peace agreement in the disputed territory and renewed their demands for a separate homeland organized as a Union Territory under the jurisdiction of the Constitution of India. After the peaceful protests community leaders formally presented Minister of State for Home Affairs Sriprakash Jaiwal with a memorandum of their demands.

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